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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000005

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: SHIA POLITICO: JA'AFARI HAS TO GO

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

1. (C) Summary: In a meeting on December 31 with Qassim Daoud, a moderate liberal in the Shia Alliance, the Ambassador stated that, while the ultimate decision rested with the Iraqi people, the U.S. Government, as a partner in the new Iraq wished to make its concerns clear. He laid out five main points: the need for a national unity government; a more efficiently run Prime Minister's office; nonpartisan and technocratic leadership of security ministries; no militia involvement in ministries; and the need for capable, qualified candidates, especially in key ministries like Oil, Finance, and Foreign Affairs. Daoud agreed and called for the active mediation of the U.S. Government, particularly to convince current Prime Minister Ibrahim Ja'afari to step aside and to support the candidacy of SCIRI's Adil Abd al-Mahdi. Daoud did admit to some reservations about Mahdi - namely that he was too close to Iran and giving away too much to the Kurds - but stressed that he was by far the only viable candidate for the position. Daoud mentioned that his own name had been put forward to head the Ministry of Interior, and he suggested several names for the other key ministries. Finally, in response to the Ambassador's query about Allawi's possible role in the new government, Daoud replied that Allawi's participation could only be through his Iraqiya List, since Allawi would never accept any post other than Prime Minister. End Summary.

Need Competent Professionals to Head Ministries

2. (C) In a meeting on December 31 with Qassim Daoud, a moderate liberal in the Shia alliance, the Ambassador stressed the need for a national unity government staffed by competent technocrats. The Ambassador stated that, while the ultimate decision rested with the Iraqi people, the U.S. Government, as a partner in the new Iraq wished to make its concerns clear. He laid out five main points:

- All main parties have expressed their support for a national unity government, although it is not clear that everyone shares the same definition of "national unity";
- The Prime Minister's office must be much better run in this new administration. The new Iraqi government, whoever is chosen as the Prime Minister, must create and develop decision-making capacities at the working level; for example, a department for policy options that could present interagency-coordinated decision options for the Prime Minister's approval and a process for follow-up;
- The security ministries are of top importance and will need strong leadership that is nonpartisan, is able to bring people together, and will gain the confidence of all citizens;
- People affiliated with militias are not acceptable for senior positions. While the final decision is up to the Iraqi people, if some of these are chosen the U.S. Government will not be able to cooperate with them;
- Ministerial appointments should be awarded on the basis of technical expertise, not as political rewards. Key ministries like Oil, Finance, and Foreign Affairs should be given careful consideration.

Yes, But Ja'afari Must Go

3. (C) Daoud agreed on the need for a national unity government and stated that he had told U.S. officials during his last trip to Washington in September that Iraq was severely polarized between the Shia and Sunni Arabs. American involvement is critical precisely because it is Iraq's partner, and if necessary the U.S. Government's refusal to cooperate with someone would be enough of a signal to Iraqi leaders. The Shia Alliance was unified on one point - current Prime Minister Ibrahim Ja'afari must step aside. According to Daoud, in his meeting with British Ambassador William Patey on December 30, Patey stated his intention to inform Ja'afari that Coalition Forces would not support him. Daoud advised Patey to make sure that Ja'afari could not spin the meeting to his own advantage by also telling Jewad al-Maliki and Ali al-Adeeb of the Coalition's decision. (Comment: We doubt that Ambassador Patey spoke for MNFI, but

in our discussions with President Jalal Talabani and British Ambassador Patey, both emphasized to the Ambassador that Ja'afari's reappointment was unacceptable. End Comment.)

14. (C) Emphasizing his own close relationship with Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Daoud stated that Sistani was also concerned about the poor quality of the leadership in both the Prime Minister's office and the Transitional National Assembly (TNA). Sistani reportedly told Daoud that current Prime Minister Ja'afari gave Sistani the impression that the U.S. supported his reappointment as Prime Minister. Sistani expressed surprise at this since he felt Ja'afari had been a disappointment. Daoud reassured Sistani that the U.S. had made no such overture to Ja'afari and indeed shared Sistani's criticism of Ja'afari's administration.

15. (C) The main priority for the Shia Alliance, Daoud continued, was to choose a Prime Minister from among its ranks. In Daoud's opinion, the only viable candidate was Adil Abd al-Mahdi. There are only two types of politicians in Iraq, Daoud stated, the dilettantes, who collect ministerial postings, and the statesmen. Mahdi was one of the few statesmen in Iraqi politics: he has good strategic vision, is a capable negotiator, and always seeks to work as part of a team. There are two concerns about Mahdi, however, confided Daoud:

- Mahdi is too close to Iran. Before Mahdi went to Washington, he called Daoud two days before to ask for his passport. When he told Daoud it was for an Iranian visa application, Daoud refused to go to Tehran with Mahdi. He told Mahdi that he had no wish to appear to be under Tehran's guidance. He advised Mahdi, however, to arrange for a short visit to Ankara as well to appear as though Mahdi was concerned about all of Iraq's neighbors, advice which Mahdi reportedly heeded. Daoud noted that, while he was personally not anti-Iranian, he shared many of Washington's fears about Iran trying to control Iraq through their shared Shia religion and about Iran's nuclear program. Stopping Iran's nuclear aspirations would also benefit Iraq's regional security, noted Daoud.

- Daoud was also concerned that Mahdi was giving too much to the Kurds. National unity, in Daoud's opinion, did not only mean an arrangement with the Kurds. Currently, the Shia Alliance had two delegations negotiating with the Kurds and the other parties. This should shortly be merged into one delegation, and a trilateral meeting of the Kurds, Tawaffuq, and the Shia Alliance should be held to hammer out the details jointly. This meeting should not be closed, however, but open to other groups as well, including former Prime Minister and leader of the Iraqiya List Ayad Allawi and the Sunni Arab National Dialog Group leader Saleh al-Mutlak. Daoud reported that Mutlak had told him he wanted to join forces with the Shia Alliance.

16. (C) The Ambassador noted that other names were also being floated as candidates for Prime Minister -- Fadilah's Nadim Jabiri, for example. Daoud dismissed as "not serious" all candidates other than Ja'afari and Mahdi and stated that reports of TNA Deputy Speaker Hussein al-Shahristani's positioning for the role had reached even Sistani's ears. According to Daoud, Sistani had merely laughed at the idea of Shahristani as Prime Minister. Ja'afari has been alienating everyone with his recent behavior, Daoud claimed. "Ja'afari believes he has a 'religious responsibility' to be Prime Minister - this language is reminiscent of Saddam," stated Daoud.

Potential Candidates?

17. (C) The Ambassador then asked Daoud whom, in his opinion, the Shia Alliance might put forward as ministerial candidates. Daoud stated that Sistani's office, Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim, and Patey had urged him to accept the Minister of Interior (MOI) position, a job Daoud was loath to take. Daoud noted that he preferred an interagency coordinator position. (Comment: Daoud has told Embassy officers in the past that he wanted a position similar to that of the U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security. End Comment.) If he were

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forced to take the MOI, however, Daoud told Hakim he would do it only under one condition - that he be given free rein, without interference from anyone, especially Badr Corps elements. This was all contingent on Ja'afari not continuing as Prime Minister, however. If the Kurds balked, the MOI position could be offered to Kosrat Rasoul Ali. (Comment: Daoud mentioned several times how unwilling he was to accept the MOI position; when pressed by the Ambassador for a plan, all he could say was that he would assess the situation. End Comment.)

18. (C) As for the other ministries, Daoud's recommendations

were:

- Ministry of Oil: Thamir al-Ghadhban, the former Minister of Oil during the Allawi government. According to Daoud, al-Ghadhban is a first-rate technocrat, manager, and strategic planner.

- Ministry of Finance: Muhammad Ali al-Hakim. He is a secular man, despite his family, said Daoud. He also worked for the Allawi government as Minister of Communications and in the Ministry of Finance; he is currently Mahdi's advisor. Mahdi felt, however, that al-Hakim's family ties would preclude him from getting this position. Daoud then speculated that a Sunni Arab might be in line for Finance, although that person would have to be a technocrat and have a good working relationship with whoever is Prime Minister.

- Ministry of Defense: The Sunni Arabs should submit names for this position. As far as Daoud is concerned, the current Minister of Defense, Sa'adun al-Dulaymi, would be acceptable. Ayad al-Sammara'i would also be a good choice, or even Mahmoud al-Mashhadani. Al-Mashhadani is a Salafist, but a man of compromise. Usama al-Tikriti could also be a possibility.

- Minister of State for Ministerial Affairs: Muhammad Ali al-Hakim would fit in this role, said Daoud, if he were rejected for the Finance position.

A Role for Allawi?

19. (C) When asked whether he envisioned a role for Allawi in the new government, Daoud stated that it could only be through his Iraqiya List. "Allawi will never consent to be anything other than the Prime Minister," stated Daoud.
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